

Rep. Lofgren Statement on H.R. 1316, the 527 Fairness Act of 2005

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Washington, DC – Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren (D-San Jose), today delivered the following statement during a Committee on House Administration markup hearing of HR1316, the 527 Fairness Act of 2005. The legislation would remove accumulated hard-money contribution limits on federal committees and parties and remove spending limits imposed on national political parties in a given election cycle.

As prepared for delivery:

"There has been a lot of talk about Watergate in the past week. The revelation that W. Mark Felt was Deep Throat has given us the opportunity to look back at this tumultuous time in our Nation's history. It is hard to believe that over thirty-two years ago Senator Sam Ervin opened the Senate hearing into the Watergate scandal. Senator Ervin's historic hearings revealed a pattern of contempt for the law by the administration of President Richard Nixon.

"A little over a year later, on July 27, 1974, the House Judiciary Committee passed the first of three articles of impeachment, charging President Nixon with obstruction of justice. The vote was 27 to 11, with 6 of the committee's 17 Republicans joining all 21 Democrats in voting to send the article to the House. Then on July 29 the second article, abuse of power, was passed, and on July 30 the third, contempt of Congress, was also passed. Less than two weeks later, President Nixon resigned.

"During that crisis, I served as a Congressional advisor to Congressman Don Edwards (D-CA). Congressman Edwards served on the Judiciary Committee during the hearing on impeachment. My service to Congressman Edwards at this time was one of the most challenging experiences of my entire career in public service.

"The actions of the Nixon Administration were shocking: breaking into the Democratic National Committee, dirty tricks, enemies list, large sums of money going unreported, lies, intimidation, abuse of power, corruption, and most notoriously, a cover-up.

"The Watergate scandal was the most serious Constitutional crisis of the 20th Century, however, something positive came out of these events. Out of Watergate came comprehensive reforms that helped to clean up and improve our political process. Among other things, the 1974 amendments to the Federal Election Campaign Act (commonly referred to as the Watergate Reform Legislation) set aggregate limits on the amount of total contributions an individual can give to political parties.

"The bill that we are marking up today will throw out the reforms that came out of the Watergate scandal. Do we really want to do away with the reforms that were made to fix our political system over 30 years ago?

"I'm afraid this bill is just another example of the contempt that the House Republicans have for rules. If they don't like a rule, they just change it. That is what Senator Frist tried to do last month in the Senate with the filibuster. That is what the House Republicans attempted to do with the Ethics Committee at the beginning of the year.

"And make no mistake; it is what they are trying to do with this bill. They want to throw out our long-established campaign finance laws. They don't like limits on contributions, so they aim to change the rules. The Republicans control everything - the House, the Senate and the White House. They use this unchecked power to change any rule they don't like.

"I will vote against this bill in markup today because I believe our political system does not need more money in it. Here are just a few facts about the 2003-2004 election cycle compiled by The Center for Responsive Politics:

Democratic National Cmte:
\$311,524,571

Republican National Cmte:
\$392,413,393

House Party Committees

Democratic Congressional Campaign Cmte:
\$92,877,868

National Republican Congressional Cmte:
\$185,719,489

Senate Party Committees

Democratic Senatorial Campaign Cmte:
\$88,657,573

National Republican Senatorial Cmte:
\$78,980,487

"Apparently this was not enough cash for my Republican colleagues. They, who so strenuously opposed the Shays/Meehan/McCain /Feingold Campaign Finance Bill just two years ago, are now pushing to throw out aggregate limits on what an individual can give to a political party. The current limit is \$101,400 per election cycle, but the supporters of this bill want more.

"We do not need to return to the days before Watergate. This bill is a very bad idea. It can not be amended or fixed. I will vote against this bill and I call on my colleagues to do the same.

"In the Watergate era lots of ordinarily good people got caught up in a web of corruption that emanated from lots of cash for performance in the government and political world. We have enough problems today in that regard as the press has noted in recent cases in the news. Let's not take this step to widen the corruption and deepen the cynicism about the People's government by our fellow Americans."